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AUTHOR Pearson, Robert P.
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ABSTRACT

This paper expresses the fear that competency-based teacher education, with its use of individualized instructional modules, may neglect the central skill of teaching--the communicative process. Communicative experience cannot be packaged. Subjects peripheral to the act of teaching are best suited to modules for individual learning. Teachers, above all others, must be able to communicate with a wide range of people and must exemplify mature, tolerant behavior in a variety of trying situations. Overemphasis on the individual can, in fact, impede the communicative process. The focus of teacher education must, therefore, be as much on the process of communicating knowledge as on the knowledge itself. Group efforts are essential. (DDO)

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A Word of Caution on Individualized Instruction in Teacher Education

I have recently been to several conferences in Pennsylvania on the subject of competency-based teacher education, which is now mandated by the State Department of Education in Pennsylvania, and as a new trend in teacher education seems to be sweeping the nation. These conferences, which outlined a series of steps by which teacher education programs could develop behavioral competencies in their programs, also promoted the idea of developing individualized instruction in the form of a wide variety of modules designed in such a way that students would have alternative ways available to them to study in certain areas and could proceed at their own pace. While the advantages of individualized instruction and the need for alternative routes are obvious, I am a little concerned about the enthusiasm, if not the reverence, with which a completely individualized approach is promoted. My main concern is that such programs may neglect the central skill of teaching, that is the communicative process that goes on in a room full of learners (by "learners" I mean both teacher and students). If teacher education programs do not model good teaching and demonstrate the communicative process, the usefulness of the programs to future teachers is questionable. Modules which can be learned individually are best suited to subjects peripheral to the act of teaching itself. For these peripheral purposes, individualized modules are well suited. They can, because they are packaged, condense certain kinds of knowledge in readily available and learnable forms. In developing the modules, therefore, great care must be taken to insure that what is packaged is in fact packageable, and that what is packageable does not become the sole focus of teacher education programs. The fact that experience in communicating ideas to people

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cannot be packaged should not be lost sight of, and this communication process must always lie at the center of a teacher education program.

The attempt of many educators today to try to objectify by means of behavioral objectives many things which in the past have been left to subjective judgments, and particularly the attempts to develop behavioral objectives for affective goals, are commendable. However, these attempts often defeat their basic purpose, for the tendency is to teach what is measurable, and what started out as an attempt to objectify affective or incidental learnings may ironically end up excluding these very learnings out of the frustration of trying to measure them. The conference leaders agreed that such concerns were a problem, but stated that if one were aware of such dangers they could be controlled. However, these questions are too easily put aside and must constantly be kept in mind as individualized instruction is developed in teacher education programs.

Some of the potential dangers of over-individualizing programs are discussed by Douglas Heath in his book Humanizing Schools.[1] Professor Heath, a psychologist at Haverford College, describes in his book the state of mind of many of the young people he has done research on over the last fifteen or twenty years, and it is on the basis of his research that he discussed the need for humanistic education in elementary and secondary schools. Heath points out the fact that many young people today spend increasing amounts of time by themselves in solitary activities. These young people in many cases as children spent large amounts of time watching television and while not watching television they were in schools where they were forced to be quiet and pay attention to the teacher. They thus had little opportunity to develop interpersonal skills and a sense of belonging to a group. Most of the young

[1] DOUGLAS HEATH, HUMANIZING SCHOOLS, NEW DIRECTIONS, 1971.

men and women in teacher education programs today have been in such learning environments as children and arrive in college with relatively little experience in working cooperatively with others. As the college environment also stresses individualism, they are further deprived of opportunities of working in partnership with others. Most college classrooms emphasize individual activity focusing on individual reading in the library or individual work in laboratories. And most of the recent innovations in college such as independent study courses, involve a student and tutor at best. The emphasis is thus more and more on doing your own thing, and defining yourself as an individual. Popular terms such as self-actualization and self-awareness indicate this trend. In discussing this phenomenon Heath's feeling is that the antidote for such an over-emphasis on the individual (which in extreme cases leads to a loss of identity and a feeling of belonginglessness) is to promote what he calls allocentric education, that is an education which focuses on the allocentric development of an individual. By this he means that the individual is helped out of his egocentric position and is encouraged to focus on things outside of himself. To learn to deal constructively with the wide variety of people and situations in which he will find himself in a rapidly changing and shrinking world, Heath feels that students must learn to feel a "we-ness" between themselves as well as between themselves and their teachers. Schools which emphasize competitive feelings between students and which emphasize individual learning at the expense of group learning fail in many ways to prepare the students for working with others in a world which needs cooperation between diverse peoples above all else.

With this in mind, we as teacher educators, must realize that everything Heath says about the need for students in elementary and secondary schools to

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receive allocentric and humanistic education is doubly true of teacher education programs. Teachers above all others must be able to communicate with a wide range of people and must exemplify mature tolerant behavior in a variety of trying situations. Teachers who know their subject well but who fail to have the necessary communication skills will be failures as teachers. In short, the biggest potential problem for teacher education programs that are modularized and individualized is the lack of emphasis on interpersonal skills.

Teaching and learning is a process which involves interaction among teachers and students about certain ideas and content material. The focus of teacher education programs thus must be as much on the process of communicating knowledge as on the knowledge itself. Now, to many, this idea may conjure up visions of meaningless methods courses, in which the angle of the body while writing on the blackboard is discussed at great length, or the way in which teachers need to hold chalk so that it won't squeek. I think, however, that we are well beyond these kinds of concerns and can develop experiences in and out of the classroom in which communication with other people is practiced.

When Heath talks about allocentric development, he is talking about the ability of individuals to relate to things outside themselves, the ability to divest themselves of a state of egoism that is all too pervasive. It is this egoism that we find in many teachers, a kind of egoism that demands that the teacher become the focus of the classroom and show himself to be the keeper of the esoteric knowledge indispensable to the world. Herein lies the relevance of Heath's thinking about allocentric development in our public schools to teacher education. If we believe that a crucial need in our society is for students to be able not only to learn on their own but to be able to relate to a wide range of people and to work cooperatively for change in an

extremely dynamic world, we must prepare teachers to teach and model the skills and attitudes necessary for such behavior. A teacher education program must thus demonstrate the kind of teaching-learning process that it hopes to instill in the teachers it produces and in turn in their students. If a teacher education program overemphasizes individual learning to the exclusion of learning with others, it will be hard put to bring about allocentric development in its student teachers. Teachers, in this situation, will have to be born and not made.

The core of a teacher education program, then, must be the creation of learning situations where students and teachers can mutually investigate subjects of interest and communicate what is learned to others. In some instances, this might involve researching a subject individually and then giving microteaching lessons to actual students brought in from the local school district. Other ways are possible as well. For example, the subject matter of any class can be divided into different topics which small groups of students can research and present to the rest of the class. These presentations can then be critiqued. The researching groups ideally would involve people of different backgrounds, different religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds as well as members of both sexes. These groups would not only research a topic but be responsible for presenting their findings to the class. The teacher, in this process, can either be a member of the group or serve as a consultant on different ways the material can be presented to the class. Thus, at all stages, the individuals in the group will be forced to work and cooperate with other people. They must determine who is going to do what, what shape the research will take, what the findings are, and the means by which they are going to present their findings to the rest of the class. They are thus in a constant

process of communicatior and must deal with not only a body of facts and opinions but with the logistics of the research and the class presentation and the method of communicating their findings to the class. The teacher thus becomes not the fount of all knowledge but a catalyst-consultant and resource both on the methodology of the research and the methodology of teaching and the communicative process. After each group makes its presentation the total class can discuss both the content and the method of presentation with an eye to determining what communication processes are most effective for various kinds of content. The class can thus simultaneously become a method of learning information, and a demonstration of various teaching methods. In this way, the focus is kept on individual initiative in learning while at the same time what is learned is never separated from a realization of the learning process. Good, modularized or pre-packaged units can supplement such a program and fill in important, but not central, gaps in a person's knowledge. With the proper balance a teacher education program can thus emphasize the learning processes discussed above. For purely factual information, pre-packaged units could be developed and for more controversial subjects, units or modules representing different points of view could be developed. In addition, other modules involving independent research should be developed which leave the student a maximum of freedom in structuring the process by which he learns the material and the content of the material itself. A lot of time and energy can be saved in the long run by such individualized modules. The core of the program, however, must involve communication between the students and professors in the program. Humanistic curriculum methodology provides the kind of interpersonal learning experiences that all teachers need. At the heart of such experiences is the development of self-knowledge and

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self-confidence and the willingness to put aside one's own ego in the interests of better and more active learning on the part of one's students. If the teacher is confident in himself as a person, he can more readily gauge when to step aside and let the student learn in his own way, making his own mistakes, and when he, as the teacher, needs to intervene in some way. In such a process the teacher must be willing to learn from his students as well as teach his students, and if his ego is fragile, he may feel too threatened to do so.

In conclusion, then, teacher educators must focus in on the communication process between teachers and students, and this necessarily involves the development of constant and high level communication experiences. As interest in competency-based teacher education and individualized and alternative ways of learning develops throughout the United States, the shortcomings, as well as the assets, of such an approach must be kept in mind. In our rapidly shrinking world we cannot afford to be producing isolated and egocentric individuals, and our schools are one good place to combat this tendency in our culture.